

Seatbelt Survivors!

In each issue of the First State Road Scholar we will highlight the story of a Delawarean who has been involved in a motor vehicle crash, and believes that he/she was saved from death or serious injury because they chose to wear a seatbelt.

Georgetown resident John Lattomus relayed this story about his wife Marie's crash to the Office of Highway Safety.

On Friday September 7th, about 10:30 a.m., my wife Marie had just finished shopping at a strip mall located at the intersection of Routes 9 and 113 in Georgetown. She got into her 1999 Eddie Bauer Ford Explorer, put on her seatbelt, started the engine, and turned right onto Route 113 from the shopping center.

She hadn't even gone a quarter of a mile, when a vehicle that was sitting in the median at Rt. 62 waiting to cross southbound 113, shot across the road and straight into her driver's side door. The driver told police he never even saw her.

Police would later estimate that the crash occurred at about 35 mph. Even at such a low speed, Marie's vehicle rolled three times and landed on its side.

I work for the state Fire Marshal's Office, and when the call went out, my co-workers drove me to the scene of the crash. When we got there, there was a blue tarp draped over her vehicle. My heart dropped to my toes, because when I see a blue tarp over a car that's been in a wreck, it usually means that someone didn't survive.

Against the advice of my friends I went to the Explorer and pulled back the tarp. Inside was Georgetown Police Officer Pedro Consuegra talking to my still conscious wife. Consuegra asked who I was, and I told him that I was her husband. After making sure that she was okay, I kissed her cheek and stepped back so rescue workers could begin to use the "jaws of life" to cut her out of the crumpled SUV.

My wife is really grateful to Officer Consuegra. She said if it weren't for him, she would have "lost it." He explained every noise and jolt that they heard and felt, and even though ordered out of the vehicle twice for his own protection, he stayed with my wife because he promised her he wouldn't leave her.

After the rescue personnel got her out, they flew her to Bebee hospital. She was one lucky lady. After that ordeal, she ended up with 14 stitches in her left elbow and a scrape on her scalp.

I know wearing that seatbelt saved her life. Otherwise she would have been thrown out of the window where the vehicle could have rolled over on her. She's actually the one who taught me to wear one when we met more than 30 years ago.

I've always been an advocate of seatbelt use, but I never knew how grateful a person could be that someone they loved was wearing one.

Well said John.